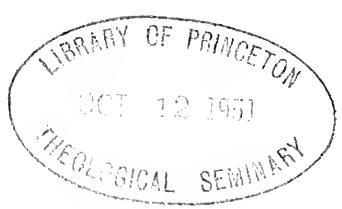


Charles Eliot Norton

Address
At the Celebration of
The Building
of the
Old Meeting-House
at Hinckley.

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With the

A D D R E S S

AT THE CELEBRATION

OF THE

TWO HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY

OF

The Building of the Old Meeting-House

AT HINGHAM.

ON THE EIGHTH OF AUGUST, 1881.

BY

CHARLES ELIOT NORTON.

CAMBRIDGE:

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A D D R E S S.

*Mr. Chairman, Reverend Sir,¹ Your Excellency,
Men and Women of Hingham:—*

You have thought it becoming to commemorate the building of this old Meeting-house on its two hundredth anniversary. You have chosen me, as the lineal descendant of the minister settled over this parish when the Meeting-house was built, whose voice was the first to ask the blessing of God within these walls, and who for many years, Sabbath after Sabbath, here taught the people of the ways of the Lord,—you have chosen me, his descendant, to give expression to the thought and sentiment natural on such an occasion as this. I undertake the duty, to which you have called me, in a spirit of filial piety. Five generations of my forefathers united with your ancestors in worship under this roof. I see around me the descendants of those who listened to the first sermon heard from the ancient pulpit. The names of Hobart, Lincoln, Thaxter, Beal, Cushing, Fearing, Loring, Hersey, Whiton, Sprague, attest the permanence of the families of the early settlers, and the continuity of the life of the town, while they bear honorable witness to the excellence of the stock planted here.

¹ Rev. Calvin Lincoln.

I shall be easily pardoned if to-day I recall a history familiar and dear to many of you.

No building in the United States is more venerable than this within which we are met. Of all edifices an ancient church is the most reverend. This is the house of worship in which the weekly service of prayer and preaching has been for a longer time continuous than in any other in New England,—probably than in any other in the United States. For us, in this still new world, its age is great. But our antiquities are modern as compared with those of our Mother-country; the oldest of them are of to-day in comparison with the Pyramids; they are novelties in the eternity of Nature. But the two centuries during which this house has existed are the longest centuries in the history of mankind, for in their course man has made greater progress in the knowledge of the world in which he lives, and consequently in power over it, than in all preceding time. His relations to Nature have changed. He has come into possession of new faculties. His thoughts have widened. The denizen of a parish two hundred years ago, the intelligent man is to-day the citizen of the world. Spiritually measured this little span of time is longer than cycles of Egypt or Cathay. To the imagination this Meeting-house is the monument of a great antiquity.

But it has more than the interest of mere age. Like all the works of the hand of man, it tells the

story of its times. It is the expression of the moral convictions and material conditions of the men who built it. Here is no fine art. No touch of beauty is visible here; no faith is here nobly realized in imperishable form; no ideals of life are displayed here in dedicated shapes of prophets, saints, and kings; no aspirations are manifest in lavish wealth of consecrated ornament; no sentiment of pious ardor finds utterance in sacred symbols. All is plain, bare, homely, unadorned, the work of an ascetic race. The fancy can hardly find, in this rough timber frame, a type of the temple of the Holy City, with its gold and silver and iron and brass and purple and crimson and blue; or recognize, in the builders with plank and shingle, a community of spirit with those who wrought miracles of stone in mediæval church and cathedral. No, this is the poor Meeting-house of a poor people, of a people moreover, to whom the adornment of the church and the pomp of ritual were an abomination, and who rejected all the imagery of earlier ages of piety, even the deepest and tenderest symbols of the faith, because associated with superstition and confounded with idolatry. To them this plain house, their Bethel, was more truly the Gate of Heaven than if it had been a pearl like the gates of the New Jerusalem; and they trusted that the promise made by Jehovah to Solomon held good also for them: "Mine ear shall be attent unto the prayer that is made in this place."

I know not if the legend be well attested, but you are familiar with the tradition that the little band of the first settlers of Hingham, on their landing here in 1635, led by the father and first minister of the town, the valiant Peter Hobart, gathered round their pastor under an old oak, to join with him in asking the blessing of the Lord on their new planting in the wilderness. Within a few months they had a house built for public worship. It was the central house of the little village, the common refuge in times of spiritual stress or material peril. In 1645, at the time of alarm lest the Narragansetts should break out in war against the colonists, it was voted to erect a palisade around the Meeting-house, "to prevent any danger that may come unto this town by any assault of the Indians." To that house, thus protected, the forefathers of the town came to worship and take counsel for forty-five years. There, for forty-three of those years, Peter Hobart, to whom Governor Winthrop bore testimony that "he was a bold man and would speak his mind," taught his people. Age brought its usual burdens to him, but his heart remained fresh, and in his last days, as Cotton Mather reports, "he set himself with great fervour to gather the children of his church under the saving wings of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in order thereunto preached many pungent sermons on Ecclesiastes xi. 9, 10, and xii. 1." Beautiful is the picture of the venerable man, himself the father of many chil-

dren whom he had carefully nurtured,¹ worn with the infirmities of years, and weary with the labors which fell to those who had, in their own words, “transported themselves, with their wives, their little ones, and their substance, from that pleasant land where they were born, over the Atlantic ocean into the vast wilderness,” for the sake of “liberty to walk in the faith of the gospel with all good conscience,” — beautiful is the picture of the old and faithful pastor, death now near at hand, looking with benignant eyes on the younglings of his flock, the first native-born New Englanders, and appealing to them: “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.”

It was on the 27th of November, 1678, that “he did with his aged hand ordain a successor, which when he had performed with much solemnity he did afterwards with an assembly of Ministers and other Christians at his own house, joyfully sing the song of aged Simeon, Thy servant now lettest thou depart in peace.” Less than eight weeks afterward he died.

That successor was Mr. John Norton, a young man twenty-seven years old, who had received as good a training as New England could then bestow. He had been bred under the shadow of the

¹ He names fifteen children in his will. Five of his sons graduated at Harvard College, and four of them became ministers.

church. Named for his more noted uncle, one of the four famous Johns who were the lights of the early church of Boston, he had derived from him a taste for learning, and the consecration to the ministry. He graduated at Harvard College in 1671, in the last class sent forth by the pious and learned President Chauncy; and Sewall, afterward Chief Justice, was one of his classmates.¹ It was a distinction then to graduate at Harvard. It meant being one of the clerical or magisterial order. It meant the possession of pre-eminent advantages. But the relation of the clergy to the community had already become very different from what it had been in the earlier days of the Colony. The contrast between the prominent position in public affairs, the wide and strong influence, the admitted authority of the uncle, and the tranquil, retired life, and the narrow limits of influence of the nephew, was not altogether the result of diversity of opportunities and of gifts. It affords an illustra-

¹ From an entry in Sewall's Diary, published by the Massachusetts Historical Society,—a book from which more is to be learned than from any other of the life of Boston and its neighborhood during the last quarter of the seventeenth century and the first quarter of the eighteenth,—it would appear that Mr. Norton had grave doubts as to coming into the Church. “Satterday, Mar. 3, 1677, went to Mr. Norton to discourse with him about coming into the Church. He told me that he waited to see whether his faith were of the operation of God’s spirit, and yet often said that he had very good hope of his good Estate . . . He said, was unsettled, had thoughts of going out of the country. . . . And at last, that he was for that way which was purely Independent. I urged what that was. He said that all of the Church were a royal Priesthood, all of them Prophets and taught of God’s Spirit, and that a few words from the heart were worth a great deal: intimating the Benefit of Brethren’s prophesying: for this he cited Mr. Dell. I could not get any more.” It is not certain that the Mr. Norton with whom Sewall held this conversation was Mr. John Norton, but it seems probable.

tion of the general fact that while religion had been the chief motive that had brought the colonists to the wilderness, and the ministers of religion had naturally been their intellectual and often their civil leaders, the mere growth of the Commonwealth they had planted, with the increase of social and political interests and responsibilities, had resulted in the diminution of the preponderance of religious concerns in the State, as well as of the authority of the clergy. The beginnings of civil democracy were weakening the hold of a dominant class. There was no sudden revolution, but a gradual and steadily increasing, though as yet hardly recognized, decline in the position and power of the ministers. As a class they still exercised authority, in virtue of their sacred calling and their superior education, but they were no longer the masters they had been.

The year 1678 was an important one in the life of the young scholar. In that year he was married, in that year he was settled over this parish, and in that year he published a poem. It was a "Funeral Elogy, Upon that Patron of Virtue, the truly pious, peerless & matchless Gentlewoman, Mrs. Anne Bradstreet." I find in my ancestor's performance very slight merit, though it gives indication of formal training in the stiff poetic fashion of the day; but the enthusiastic historian of American Literature, Professor Tyler, who has an eye for swans, discovers in it "force" and "beauty," calls it "a sorrowful and

stately chant," and even ascribes "poetic genius" to its author. Its real interest is in the proof that he possessed a fair measure of such culture as was possible in New England at the time, and that he brought to Hingham the refined tastes, the scholarly disposition, and the literary sympathies which would confirm the regard of his people to him, and could hardly fail to quicken their own intellectual life.

With the new minister came the thought of a new meeting-house. The people had outgrown the old house. The Indians had been defeated; King Philip was dead; the palisado was no longer needed for defence. After long debate and bitter difference, it was resolved to build a new house on a new site. Human nature was then much as it is now. "There have been successively many days of temptation," says Cotton Mather, "in this and that particular plantation throughout the country: one while the rebuilding and removing of meeting-houses has unfitted the neighbors for lifting up pure hands without wrath in those houses, and one while the disposal of little matters in the militia has made people almost ready to fall upon one another with force of arms." Hingham experienced both these temptations. But the good sense of her people carried them through these trials without lasting harm. On the 26th, 27th, and 28th days of July (Old Style), 1681, the frame of the new Meeting-house was raised; on the 5th of January, 1681-2, the town-meeting

was held for the first time in the completed house ; and on the next Sunday, the 8th of January, the services of public worship were first held within it, and two infants were baptized. It had cost the town £430 and the old house.¹

The building of the new Meeting-house was an indication of the prosperity of the people, and of their recovery from the losses and depression occasioned by King Philip's War. New England was now at peace ; and the inhabitants of her towns and villages were busy with their domestic concerns, and with preparation for the struggle into which they were entering to maintain their political and ecclesiastical liberties against the aggressions of the English Crown. For Hingham these were tranquil days, and cheerful, in such narrow sense as the word retains when applied to the life of New England at the end of the seventeenth century,—a life for the most part grave, sombre, austere. The interests of the dwellers in a village like Hingham, though more varied than those of the inhabitants of inland settle-

¹ This was no small sum. Dr. Palfrey seems to believe that in 1679 the value of the personal property of the whole Plymouth Colony did not amount to over £12,000. See his *History of New England*, iii. 215. The sum required to pay for the Meeting-house was raised by a rate made in 1680 by the selectmen. The rate was levied on one hundred and forty-three persons ; the smallest sum laid on any one was five shillings, the largest £15 12*s.* 6*d.* See appendix to the Rev. Calvin Lincoln's *Discourse, delivered to the First Parish in Hingham, Sept. 8, 1869, on Re-opening their Meeting-house*, pp. 25-28.

The minister's salary was £85. In 1698 the rate made for the maintenance of the ministry, school, poor, etc., was £130, and the price of grain was fixed as follows : Indian corn, 3*s.* per bushel, barley, 3*s.*, rye, 3*s.* 6*d.*, and oats, 1*s.* 6*d.* — LINCOLN'S *History of Hingham*, p. 89, note.

ments, were few and narrow. Men and women applied themselves to their different modes of rugged industry in a sober and severe spirit, born of hardship and poverty, and of nature kindred to their religion. Their recreations were scanty and infrequent; many simple amusements were prohibited by law, others by public opinion. The natural gayety of youth and the peasant exhilaration of good spirits were alike repressed. It was not because men were virtuous that there were neither cakes nor ale, but because their religion had spoiled their taste for cakes and ale. Hardly one gay laugh of light-hearted and innocent mirth is heard in those days. "Once hearing some of us laughing very freely," writes the Rev. Nicholas Noyes, one of the most cruel persecutors of the witches at Salem, in his account of the excellent Rev. Mr. Thomas Parker,— "once hearing some of us laughing very freely, while I suppose he was better busied in his chamber above us, he came down, and gravely said to us: 'Cousins, I wonder you can be so merry, unless you are sure of your salvation.' "

Not a song has come down to us from that time; not a love poem; not a strain of secular music. The elevating delights of the arts were unknown, and the lack of them unfelt. The creative and poetic imagination found scanty nutriment in a soil not yet enriched by long human experience and tradition.

Nature vainly displayed her ever-renewed beauty to the eyes of men and women who saw in it a snare

for their souls, and regarded her as an enemy rather than a friend. The rosy-fingered dawn smiled in vain as she mounted from the eastern sea over the islands of your bay, and the stars —

“ Burning fierce anthems to the eternal light ” —¹

rose ineffectual save to darken with intenser gloom the souls of men who felt themselves fallen under the curse of Adam. In the writings of the first and second generations of the native-born New Englanders, there is scarcely a touch of genuine observation of nature, or an indication of pleasure in her aspect. The famous Anne Bradstreet sings of Philomel “ chanting a most melodious strain ” on the banks of the Merrimac. Neither she nor any of her contemporaries had eyes for the flowers or ears for the birds of New England.

One single passage, inspired by the homely nature familiar to him, stands conspicuous and beautiful in the quaint treatise² entitled “ *Phænomena quædam Apocalypticæ*; or, some few Lines toward a Description of the New Heaven as it makes to those who stand upon the New Earth,” of the sedate, stout-hearted, provincial Judge Sewall. It is like a breath of fresh air, and has a sparkle of the open sunshine. It is a prophecy of the Christians of Newbury: —

¹ This strong verse is from a feeble and tumid Funeral Song by Samuel Wigglesworth, the son of the more noted poet, Mr. Michael Wigglesworth.

² First printed in 1697; a second edition appeared in 1727; this paragraph which I cite is like a white patch on a black robe.

"As long as Plum Island shall faithfully keep the commanded post, notwithstanding all the hectoring words and hard blows of the proud and boisterous ocean, as long as any salmon or sturgeon shall swim in the streams of Merrimac, or any perch or pickerel in Crane Pond; as long as the sea-fowl shall know the time of their coming, and not neglect seasonably to visit the places of their acquaintance; as long as any cattle shall be fed with the grass growing in the meadows that do humbly bow down themselves before Turkey Hill; as long as any sheep shall walk upon Old-Town hills, and shall from thence pleasantly look down upon the River Parker, and the fruitful marshes lying beneath; as long as any free and harmless doves shall find a white-oak or other tree within the township, to perch, or feed, or build a careless nest upon, and shall voluntarily present themselves to perform the office of gleaners after barley-harvest; as long as Nature shall not grow old and dote, but shall constantly remember to give the rows of Indian corn their education by pairs,—so long shall Christians be born there, and being first made meet, shall from thence be translated to be made partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

Few of his contemporaries had such open vision as this pure, tender-hearted, upright magistrate.

Temptation and danger lay around the people. The forest encompassed them, giving shelter not only to wild beasts but to the Indian savage. In 1676, in war-time, John Jacob went out with his musket to shoot the deer that trespassed on a field of wheat, on what you still call Glad-Tidings Plain. He was found dead near his father's house, killed by the Indians. The next day Joseph Joanes's and Anthony Sprague's and three other houses were

burned. This was in war-time, but it takes a long while to get rid of the impression made upon the fancy, especially upon the sensitive fancy of childhood, by such events as these. Boys and girls durst not venture to the far end of the pasture for berries or for the cattle. Men carried their firelocks to the hay-field, and when they strolled fishing along the shore.

But the fancy was even more affected by dread of the spiritual occupants of solitary places than by fear of wolf or Indian. The Devil was everywhere. "No place that I know of," says one of the Boston preachers, "no place that I know of has got such a spell upon it as will always keep the Devil out." "He is here, even in the Meeting-house." "Go where we will, he is nigh unto us." There was no saying what form, familiar or strange, alluring or terrifying, he or his ministers might not assume, what illusion they might not practise. Grave, pious, and learned men fostered the belief in these spectral apparitions. It was a common opinion that "the devils had doubtless felt a more than ordinary vexation from the arrival of Christians in this wilderness," which previously they had occupied unmolested by "the sacred exercises of Christianity." It was ten years after this Meeting-house was built that the devils displayed their power on the other side of the bay, in the frightful visitation of witchcraft with which Salem was cursed. Men, women, and children gathered round the fireside at night to scare them-

selves into frenzy with reports of the deeds of witches, with stories of spectres and signs and portents. In the howlings of the wintry winds they heard the voices of the devils of the air. They interpreted every mishap as a buffet of the Evil One.

Ignorance added to their terrors. The native-born New Englanders were less instructed than the patriarchs, men of liberal education and wise counsel, who had come from the Old World. They were farther from the sources of enlarged understanding and liberal culture. They were no longer borne onward by the deeper currents of the life of the world. They had become provincial. Their minds had narrowed to their fortunes; their intellectual interests were scanty. Books were few; in many households the Bible was the only one. Even the Minister's library was but poorly supplied, and its shelves were for the most part loaded with treatises of controversial theology. The resources of English literature were unknown. Some of the chief glories of literature were prohibited. Shakespeare was a playwright, the minister of corruption. For a century after the settlement of New England I find no evidence that there was a copy of Shakespeare in the colonies.¹ Pioneers and farmers have

¹ Of course there are likely to have been a few copies in the hands of men not Puritan at heart; but there is no reference to his works, so far as I know, in any New England book of this period. The student of New England life would give much for the catalogue of two collections of books, the first, the library of Mr. Winthrop the younger, to which Governor Winthrop refers in his History, under the year 1640, in a passage that curiously illustrates the superstitious temper of the times, when even the wisest of the leaders of the Colony could write: "About this time there fell out a thing worthy

little leisure, and less inclination to read. There were no newspapers.¹ There were no means, by regular communications from distant places, of diverting or enlarging the thoughts. The horizon of ideas was as limited as the horizon of the landscape.

But the intelligence—stunted, starved as it might be—sought and found nourishment for itself, not altogether healthy, in one important source. Religion became the absorbing and permanent intellectual concern. It partook of the dryness of the intellectual life outside of it, but it served to keep alive the minds of men. The system of theology then generally accepted was one of the most complex and elaborate bodies of doctrine that has ever been devised by the ingenuity of subtle and vigorous thinkers in the attempt to frame a creed that should account for the existence of the universe, the nature of the Creator, and the destiny of man. Based upon the assumption of the absolute authority of the Scriptures, of the Old not less than of the New

of observation. Mr. Winthrop the younger, one of the magistrates, having many books in a chamber where there was corn of divers sorts, had among them one wherein the Greek testament, the psalms, and the common prayer were bound together. He found the common prayer eaten with mice, every leaf of it, and not any of the two other touched, nor any other of his books, though there were above a thousand." Savage's *Winthrop*, ed. 1826, ii. 20. The list of this thousand volumes would show us what books the first settlers brought over. The second catalogue that one might wish for is that of the venture of books brought over by John Dunton in 1686, for sale in Boston, of which he says, in his entertaining *Life and Errors*, that "they were most of them practical and well suited to the genius of New England," p. 152.

¹ The first Anglo-American newspaper, the *Boston News-Letter*, appeared on Monday, April 24, 1704. It was a small folio half-sheet, issued weekly. It contained little news, and had a narrow circulation.

Testament, as the Word of God, and their complete sufficiency as a theory of the universe and a guide to conduct, the creed attempted to embody the doctrines essential to salvation in a series of mutually dependent logical propositions. In its practical application to life it was probably the most artificial and the most oppressive creed that has ever exercised a lasting influence upon a civilized Christian community. The fallen nature of man through sin, the enmity of God toward the human beings he had created, the responsibility of man and his helplessness to free himself from the curse denounced upon him, the damnation of infants, the eternal duration of the torments of hell to which the vast majority of mankind were doomed, weighed with unrelieved gloom upon the soul. There was nothing to break the force of the tyranny exercised in the name of religion over the spirits of the men and women and children in these regions. There was no delivery from it. The strong were subdued, the weak were crushed by it. In his Diary, under date of Jan. 13, 169 $\frac{5}{6}$, Judge Sewall makes this entry concerning his little daughter Betty, a girl of fourteen :—

“When I came in, past 7. at night, my wife met me in the Entry, and told me Betty had surprised them. I was surprised with the abruptness of the Relation. It seems Betty Sewall had given some signs of dejection and sorrow; but a little after dinner she burst out into an amazing cry, which caus'd all the family to cry too; Her Mother ask'd the reason; she gave none; at last said she was

afraid she should goe to Hell, her Sins were not pardon'd. She was first wounded by my reading a Sermon of Mr. Norton's about the 5th of Jan. Text Jn^o 7.34, Ye shall seek me and shall not find me. And those words in the Sermon, Jn^o 8. 21, Ye shall seek me and shall die in your sins, ran in her mind, and terrified her greatly. And staying at home Jan. 12, she read out of Mr. Cotton Mather—Why hath Satan filled thy heart, which increas'd her Fear. Her Mother ask'd her whether she pray'd. She answer'd, Yes; but feared her prayers were not heard because her Sins not pardon'd. Mr. Willard [the minister] though sent for timelyer . . . came not till after I came home. He discoursed with Betty who could not give a distinct account, but was confused as his phrase was, and as had experienced in himself. Mr. Willard pray'd excellently. The Lord bring Light and Comfort out of this dark and dreadful cloud, and grant that Christ's being formed in my dear child, may be the issue of these painful pangs.”¹

Such a domestic picture, impressive as it is, is but a feeble illustration of deeper unrecorded agonies.

The gentlest preacher must deliver from the pulpit the harsh teaching of his creed. Mr. Norton is reported to have been of a mild spirit, and to have possessed an amiable disposition, but there is no reason to suppose that he failed in orthodoxy or softened the stern features of Calvinistic doctrine.²

¹ Massachusetts Historical Society's Collections. Fifth Series, v. 419.

² Only one of his sermons during his long pastorate of thirty-seven years was printed. It was an Election Sermon delivered on May 26, 1708. “Such an occasion,” says Hawthorne, “formed an honorable epoch in the life of a New England clergyman.” Sewall's entry in his *Diary* concerning the sermon is amusing and instructive: “Midweek, May 26, 1708. Mr. Jno. Norton preaches a Flattering Sermon as to the Governour.” “May 27. I was with a Committee in the morn, . . . and so by God's good providence absent when Mr. Corwin and Cushing were order'd to Thank Mr. Norton for his sermon and desire a Copy.” The sermon, printed under the title of *An Essay tending to promote Education*, contains some praise of Governor Dud-

The faith he held and taught made life and death alike awful. It did not console, it did not cheer. It alarmed, it quenched gladness, it destroyed confidence, it all but destroyed hope; it invigorated but with the invigoration of fear. I do not draw an exaggerated outline. The one book produced in the seventeenth century in New England that attained a real popularity was the poem called "The Day of Doom" of Mr. Michael Wigglesworth, the worthy pastor of the church in Malden, who has recently been described as "one of the most honored, eminent, and useful men of the early years of Massachusetts." "The Day of Doom" was first printed in 1662, and it is stated that eighteen hundred copies were sold within a single year.¹ But this did not satisfy the demand. Edition after edition was called for, the sixth appearing in Boston in 1716. It was besides twice reprinted in England. The book is of no worth as poetry; the verse is mere doggerel; there is not a touch of poetic fancy, not a gleam of imagination in it. It is a description

ley which was naturally distasteful to the Judge, who stood in manful opposition to Dudley's policy; but it is in other respects a creditable discourse, mainly directed against the prevailing unbelief. "Our degeneracy," said the preacher, "is too palpable to be denied, too gross to be excused." "The longer Judgment is delayed, the heavier it will be when it cometh. It shall come; it hath sometime Leaden feet, but Iron hands."

Two years afterward, March 26, 1710, Judge Sewall "went to Hingham to Meeting, heard Mr. Norton from Psal. 145. 18. Setting forth the Propitioufulness of God. In the afternoon Lydia Cushing & Paul Lewis were baptized. Din'd with Major Thaxter, Sup'd with Mr. Norton, Mrs. Norton, & their sister Shepard."

¹ Tyler's *History of American Literature*, ii. 34. This sale, says Professor Tyler, "implies the purchase of a copy by at least every thirty-fifth person in New England,—an example of the commercial success of a book never afterward equalled in this country."

of the Day of Judgment in coarse, realistic strokes, exhibiting the common belief concerning the moral government of God, his relations to his creatures, and his final judgment of them. Nothing could be of greater value as an illustration of the dominant superstition, as a measure of the popular culture. No more cruel and detestable picture was ever drawn under the pretence of exalting the justice of the Almighty. The character attributed to the Supreme Being is perhaps as outrageous and execrable as a good man ever ascribed to the object of his adoration. The work is a marvel of the perversion of piety and intelligence. Superstition more gross never sheltered itself under the garb of Christian doctrine. And yet it was the accepted expression of the prevailing creed in New England at the time this Meeting-house was built.

The morality exacted by this creed could be attained by few. In the wrestlings with sin, omnipotence seemed often on the side of the Devil. What agonies of heart, what terrors of conscience, what miseries of contrition were the lot of many a pure and innocent soul! Into what hardness of heart, what narrowness of sympathy, what perversion of judgment, what pride of self-righteousness, were not even good men in danger of falling! To what indifference to sin, what recklessness of conduct, what self-abandonment, was not many a light-hearted spirit driven through inability to master a passing temptation!

It was just after Mr. Norton's settlement, about two years before this Meeting-house was built, that a Synod of the churches was called in Boston to consider "What are the evils that have provoked the Lord to bring his judgments on New England," and "What is to be done, that so these evils may be reformed." It was acknowledged that there was degeneracy in New England, "that people had begun notoriously to forget the errand into the wilderness," that "the enchantments of this world caused the rising generation to forget the interests of religion," and that consequently "that God hath a controversy with his New England people is undeniable, the Lord having written his displeasure in dismal characters against us." "It is sadly evident," said the Reforming Synod, "that there are visible evils manifest which without doubt the Lord is provoked by." There is great decay of the power of Godliness amongst many professors in these churches. Pride both spiritual and in apparel doth abound, even among the poorer sort of people. Church fellowship and other divine institutions are greatly neglected. There is great profaneness. There is much sabbath-breaking. There is much amiss in what concerns families and the government thereof. There are sinful heats and hatreds, evil surmisings, backbitings, lawsuits. There is much intemperance; the heathenish and idolatrous practise of health-drinking is too frequent. There are heinous breaches of the seventh

commandment, and the temptations thereunto are become too common, such as immodest apparel, laying out of hair, borders . . . mixed dancings, light behavior, unlawful gaming, abundance of idleness. There is much want of truth among men. There is inordinate affection unto the world, shewn in covetousness; farms and merchandisings being preferred before the things of God. “In this respect the interest of New England seemeth to be changed. We differ from other outgoings of our nation, in that it was not any worldly considerations that brought our fathers into this wilderness, but religion, even that so they might build a sanctuary unto the Lord’s name, whereas now religion is made subservient unto worldly interests.” There hath been opposition to the work of reformation. Sin and sinners have many advocates. A public spirit is greatly wanting in the most of men. And, finally, there are sins against the Gospel, whereby the Lord has been provoked.¹

Such in brief is the indictment brought against the people by the clergy. It is evidence of the strength of resistance of human nature against a strict ecclesiastical system, against overstrained demands in the name of religion. That there had been a decay of the ancient piety is no doubt true, but we are not to accept these charges against the community as evidence of general depravity. Even

¹ Mather’s *Magnalia*, book v. part 4, is devoted to this Reformatory Synod, “with subsequent essays of reformation in the Churches.”

the divines of the time did not all of them consent that the backsliding of the people of God in this land had been so great. Cotton Mather, for example, in introducing the account of this Synod in his "Magnalia," declares, "the most impartial observers must have acknowledged that there was proportionably still more of true religion, and a larger number of the strictest saints in this country than in any other on the face of the earth." But this solemn testimony of the ministers against the sins of the people had a real foundation in the tendency of the time, adverse to the former strictness of church order. The gradual relaxation of ecclesiastical severities in Massachusetts was accompanied by some real as well as apparent laxity of morals. Mr. Norton may have had occasion within these walls to warn your ancestors and mine against the sins which the Synod rebuked, and to lament their lukewarmness of spirit and the lack of the ancient piety. It is apt to look from the pulpit as if the earth were growing darker, such is the contrast at all times between the ideal and the actual conduct of life. Let us hope that he and his people sometimes found in the Gospel consoling truths, ministering comfort and hope, of which not the degeneracy of the times nor the character of their faith could deprive them.

False, oppressive, as the creed of New England had been and then was, we are not to forget that it nurtured precious virtues. From the rock itself

sprang living waters. The creed was the production of men of independent souls, of resolved purpose, of moral integrity. It bred men of like temper. It was the creed of political independents, and of republican institutions. The seed of liberty lay in it. The doctrine of the fall of man brought all men on a level. King, priest, the noble, the rich, were sinners in the eyes of the Lord no less than the poor and the humble. God is no respecter of persons was its first lesson. It was no creed of mere authority to be believed because incredible. Irrational as it was it addressed the reason no less than the conscience. It required discussion and discrimination. It opened the way to endless controversy. The Bible, the Word of God, was its source, but the reason must be appealed to for the right interpretation of that Word. Many false premises were taken for granted, many false conclusions drawn from them. But the argument was an exercise of the reasoning faculty. Wits were sharpened in theological disputation for use in other debates. Thought slowly won its freedom ; and freedom led to truth. Freedom of mind is the prerequisite of free institutions. Theology was close akin to politics. History as well as doctrine was studied in the Old Testament. When, in 1683, Edward Randolph, the arch-enemy of Massachusetts, was departing for England to give his aid toward vacating the Charter of the Colony, the old patriot and Deputy-Governor, Thomas Danforth, addressed him

a brief letter of warning, with references to appropriate passages in Genesis, Exodus, and the Acts.¹ It was characteristic of the mode of thought and argument of the times. The faith of the New England Puritan, while debasing him before the Lord, gave him virtue to stand before tyrants.

From the beginning their religion, their manner of life, the wilderness which they were compelled to conquer, the institutions which they established and maintained, were preparing the colonists to become the founders of the mightiest empire of self-governed men that the world has seen. And during the whole course of Colonial history, the meeting-house — the house for the town-meeting as well as for the worship of God — was the central hearth of light and warmth for the little world of each community.

At length, in 1716, after thirty-seven years of ministry, the old pastor, of whom so little is known, but whose praise is in the tranquillity of his long term of service, was gathered to the fathers. Some time passed before his successor was chosen; but in June, 1718, a young graduate of Harvard College,² Ebenezer Gay, not yet twenty-two years old, was ordained in this house, and here for almost seventy years did this good man preach. He was ninety years old when, on a Sunday morning, as he was preparing for the usual public services of the day,

¹ The letter may be found in Palfrey, *History of New England*, iii. 375.

² Of the class of 1714; a class of eleven members, of whom four were natives of Hingham, one of them being a grandson of Mr. Hobart, the first minister.

death came to him. His pastorate, and that of his predecessor, stretch over a hundred years, from the dark days of the vacating of the Old Charter of Massachusetts, and the tyranny of Andros, to the establishment of the Independence of America and the adoption of the National Constitution. Hingham had borne her little part, not without credit, through the century; and she owes lasting gratitude to these venerable teachers who, generation after generation, devoted themselves to the training of her sons in the service of the Lord that so they might do good service to their land.

One figure stands specially notable as representative of Hingham during the years of the Revolution and the foundation of the Republic,—that of General Benjamin Lincoln. The Lincolns are of the original stock of the town, and there is no need to recount here, where the story is familiar, what credit they have done to it for two hundred and fifty years. In this Meeting-house, in 1733, Benjamin Lincoln, son of Benjamin, was baptized by Dr. Gay. He was brought up under this pulpit, and it is not venturing too much to ascribe a share of his qualities to the influence of the disposition and discourse of his learned, liberal, kindly, and devout minister and friend. Lincoln's character bears the true New England stamp. He had the virtues of a simple, sturdy, self-respecting community. He was the foremost man of the town, because in him the best qualities of her people found fullest ex-

pression. He was not a man of genius either in field or council, but he had that saving common-sense which is the intelligence of the community concentrated in an individual. "I entertain a very high opinion of his judgment and abilities," wrote Washington at an early period of their acquaintance. "He is an active, spirited, sensible man." He was in truth all this and more. Washington himself was not of purer integrity, nor of completer self-possession. Neither elated by success nor depressed by defeat, steady under either fortune, free from jealousy and selfish ambition, cordial in spirit, kindly in temper, he discharged faithfully and with honor every duty with which he was intrusted; and devoting all his faculties to his country's cause, he rendered her service that will make his name immortal in her annals. I like to dwell on the life of this honest farmer of Hingham, who rose to the level of high duties on a great stage, performing them simply as he would have performed those of Justice of the Peace, or member of the Great and General Court. He embodies the plain, substantial excellence of the New England village, the child of the meeting-house and the school,—no hero but a well grown man.¹

¹ Mr. Norton here interrupted himself to read the following letter, which he gave to the town to be preserved in the Public Library:—

WATERTOWN, July 29, 1775.

GENTLEMEN:—When I accepted a seat at the Council Board, I moved in the House that a precept might go out, empowering the Town of Hingham to send another member to ye General Court. The request was granted; and I here inclose to you the precept. I hope the Inhabitants of the Town of Hingham & ye District of Cohassett will improve the priviledge.

The theology of Dr. Gay was of a milder type than that of his predecessor. The conditions of life in the older settlements of the country, like Hingham, were adverse to the literal harshness of the still nominally accepted creed. Without violence of disruption, without intermission of devout service, without recognition of any special moment of change, the faith of the community became less and less technically orthodox, was less rigid in adherence to the Five Points of Calvinism, and shaped itself gradually into conformity with the genial temper of a people that was becoming strong and prosperous, less anxious and more confident in itself, from decade to decade. The standards of morality became more rational. Men might wear their hair short or long, as it pleased them, without sin. They had begun to laugh and to dance, though still with some rigidity of feature and awkwardness of limb.

Altho' Gentlemen, I am removed from the House of Representatives, and therefore am not considered as your particular representative in General Court, yet y^t will not remove from my mind the great obligations I am under to the Inhabitants of the Town of Hingham & y^e District of Cohasset, nor will it discharge me from the duty I owe them, or lessen y^e concern I have to promote their best interest so far as my small ability shall enable me to do it,—for I consider that it is partly owing to their favourable notice of me that I have been brot into public view—I recollect with gratitude that they have conferred upon me most if not all the places of honour & trust that were in their power to give.

That they have kindly accepted my small services when I have been employed by them, & have been disposed not to exaggerate my many faults & imperfections, but on y^e other hand have discovered a disposition at all times to draw a vail over them — to be forgetfull of or silent with regard to such notice, respect & tenderness would argue want of gratitude, and criminal inattention or great insensibility.

I am Gentlemen with great esteem for you, y^e Town & District your most obliged, obedient, & Hum^c Servant.

BENJ. LINCOLN.

To y^e Gentlemen Selectmen of Hingham & Cohassett.

General Lincoln was a devout Christian of the new type; and when in 1787 Henry Ware succeeded Dr. Gay in this parish, Lincoln, thirty years his senior, was in sympathy with the liberal views of the young minister, and a friendship grew up between them, founded on mutual respect and conformity of religious opinion.

Mr. Ware was a worthy follower, in purity of character, in learning, and in intelligence, of his three predecessors; but when in 1805 he was called to Harvard College, although he had occupied this pulpit for eighteen years, his pastorate was less than half as long as the shortest of the preceding ministries.

In 1806 the Rev. Joseph Richardson was ordained to succeed him. Differences of religious opinion, as well as personal differences, attended his settlement, and a portion of the parish withdrew to form a new society. In the course of years the differences have disappeared, and the two societies recognize their common faith and history, and take an almost equal pride in the Old Meeting-house. With various interruptions, occasioned by the part he took in public life, as well as by ill-health, Mr. Richardson remained Minister of this parish until ten years ago, when at the age of almost ninety-four, his death closed a pastoral term of more than sixty-five years. In 1855 the Rev. Calvin Lincoln, himself a descendant of Peter Hobart, was settled as Associate Pastor, and to-day we are gladdened by his venerable pres-

ence, and salute in him the sixth in that line of eminent and faithful servants of the people of the Lord, whose record is the story and the commendation of Hingham for two centuries and a half.¹

Such a record is unmatched, so far as I know, in the annals of New England. There is a peculiar and pleasing correspondence between the permanence of this house and the long duration of the service of each of those who have ministered within it. The changes in the house itself, since it was erected, typify the changes in the creed of the preachers. It has been enlarged since its first construction, as if in accord with the more comprehensive scheme of salvation. Its inner structure has more than once been made more commodious, as if to typify the greater spiritual comfort of the doctrine delivered from the desk. Sixty years ago it was warmed for the first time in the winter season, as if a milder and more genial heat was required, as the flames died away in that dismal place where, according to Mr. Michael Wigglesworth,—

“God’s fierce ire kindleth the fire,
And vengeance feeds the flame
With piles of wood, and brimstone flood,
That none can quench the same.”

But as the Old Meeting-house still stands essentially the same, so in spite of differences of form

¹ A few weeks after the delivery of this address the Rev. Mr. Lincoln died. He was nearly eighty-two years old, and was struck down in the performance of the services on Sept. 8, 1881, the day appointed for prayer for the recovery of President Garfield.

and statement of belief, in spite of differences of moral judgment and spiritual aim, the congregation gathers here from week to week with essentially the same purpose as that which brought our forefathers to this house,—namely, to be instructed in the truth and to study to be good. A continuous spiritual life runs through the centuries, and here its continuity is most deeply felt, for here in each generation have high ideals been quickened, pure resolves animated, and all that was best in the hearts and souls of the men and women of this town cherished, strengthened, and confirmed.

The record of recent years is no less significant of the worth of the lessons received here than that of the earlier time. There are associations belonging to this house, within the remembrance of those still young among you, that shall help to confirm the character of the latest generation of worshippers that shall gather here. Twenty years ago many a youth went out from yonder door to meet danger and death with a high heart. Here America, through your lips, Reverend Sir, appealed in the name of religion to her sons, and did not appeal in vain. Here, when the storm of war had ceased, the town gathered to mourn and to honor, not only her own dead sons, but him, revered, beloved of the whole nation, him beyond praise, him of the Hingham name, Abraham Lincoln; and here, but six years ago, the town assembled once more to offer its tribute of undying honor to its own great

citizen, the man worthy to be named in the same breath with Abraham Lincoln,— John Albion Andrew. Such associations as these, such memories, are the live coals on the altar to kindle virtuous aspiration into flaming achievement.

Who shall ever enter this house hereafter in times of stress, when the State calls on her children for sacrifice of private interests to public service, without recalling the resplendent example of Andrew, and drawing inspiration from his magnanimous devotion to the cause of humanity and liberty? His was a manly nature. You remember him,— the cheerful neighbor, the lover of children, the friend of the poor, the comforter of those in trouble, the man of simple tastes, the lover of nature and of poetry; with sympathies quick as light, with feelings warm as a mother's heart; ardent and impetuous in spirit, ready in counsel, prompt in decision; the Puritan in the blamelessness of his life, the latitudinarian in the breadth of his charity, the Cavalier in the dash of his charge, the Roundhead in his faith in God and in the keeping his powder dry, and in every attitude and action the good citizen, the sound, large-hearted man. You remember— for was he not yours by adoption?— how naturally he grew up to the foremost place in the State; by what open and honest means he won the confidence of the people of the Commonwealth; how he scorned subterfuge and the devious arts of trading politicians; how the people recognized in him the

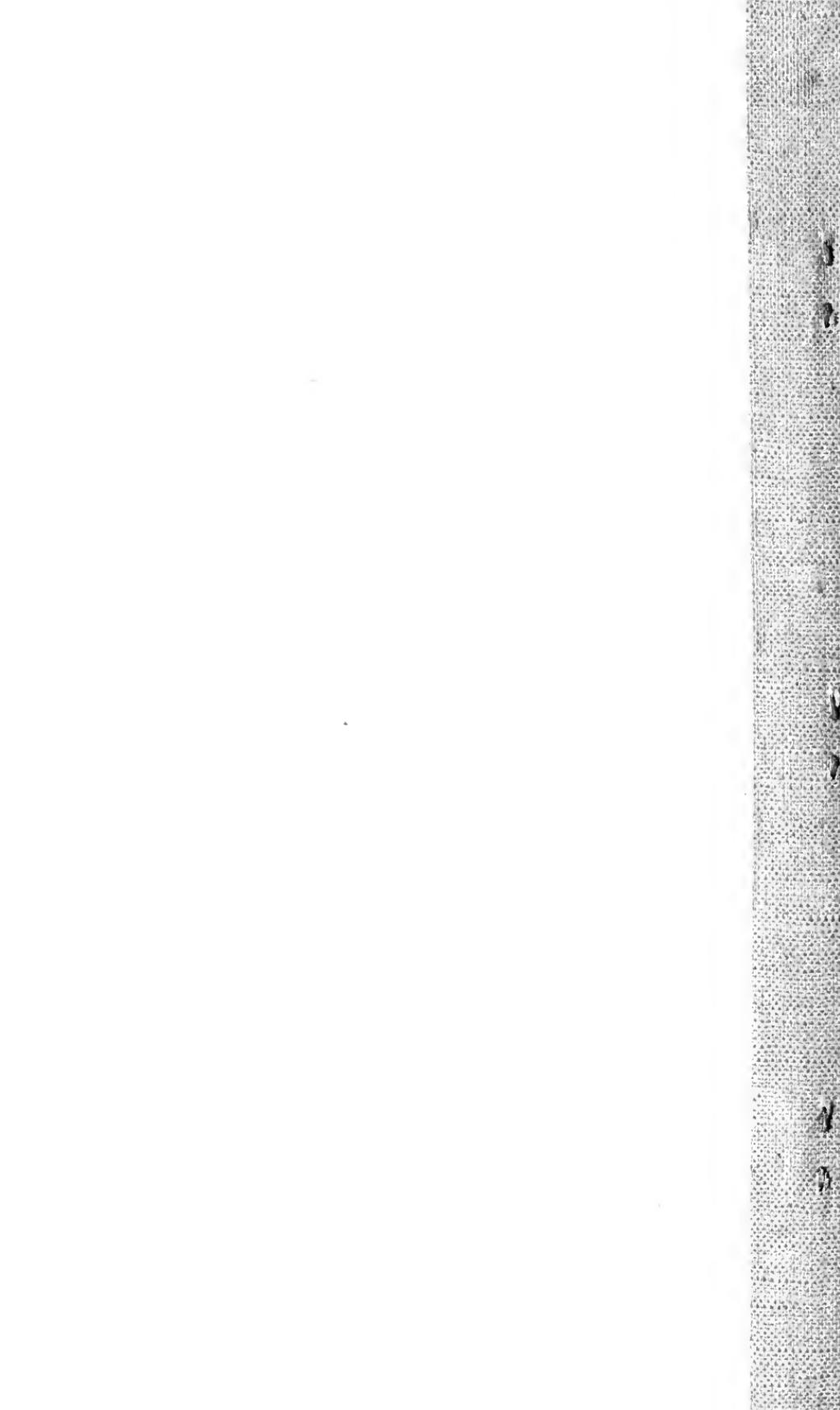
embodiment and expression of their own best sentiment and purpose. No Governor ever stood a more complete representative of his State than John A. Andrew stood during the years of war. For the moment he and Massachusetts were one. As the great heart of the generous new West beat in the breast of Lincoln, so the great heart of the older East answered sympathetically to it in the pulses of Andrew. From the first call of the war until the last he was always in the front; and when the war was over his liberal hand was the first to be held out, with hearty and frank confidence, to the enemy against whom he had fought so strenuously. He gave his life to his country, and in the bugle notes over his grave were heard the laments of the Union, South and North, blending in sorrow for the friend of all mankind,—“for behold the Lord had taken away the stay and the staff, the mighty man and the man of war, the judge, and the prophet, and the prudent, and the honorable man, and the counsellor, and the eloquent orator.”

In your Excellency's [Governor Long] interesting sketch of the life of Governor Andrew, in the volume which records the services and sacrifices of the sons of Hingham for the cause of Freedom and Union, you have spoken of the worth of his example for future generations. It is, indeed, an example for times of prosperity and peace, no less than for those of adversity and war. It is the virtue of a

great character to be of universal service, to help men in ordinary as well as in exceptional occasions. For the village Hampden, or the hero who reads his history in a nation's eyes, follows but one and the same path, the narrow path of duty, which sometimes may become the path of glory, but which for the most part is simply the path of every-day life. This path, trodden by the common men and women of every period, is the thread of light running unbroken through the past up to the present hour. Creeds change, temptations differ, old landmarks are left behind, new perils confront us, but always the needle points to the North Star, and always are some common men and women following its guidance. And this is what unites us in spiritual relationship with those ancestors of ours from whom we are parted so widely in faith, in knowledge, and in manners, and whose remoteness from us is marked, not so much by astonishing difference in material circumstances, as by changes in thought and belief. They will not disown us for their children so long as we do our duty faithfully, as they did theirs. They fought a good fight with the devils of adversity and hardship; it is for us to fight with the devils of prosperity and ease. The aspect of the battle has changed, but the battle still goes on. They have entered into rest; we are in the heat of work. May our work be not less strenuous, not less deserving to endure than theirs; so that when this day shall be the past of two hun-

dred years, and our children's children shall gather here again, to seek fresh invigoration for the performance of duty, they may find it in our example as well as in that of our elders, and say as we say,—

“LET THE WORK OF OUR FATHERS STAND!”

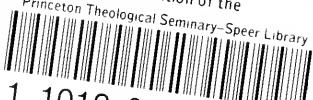




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